The Prelude from Bach's Suite No. 4 for Violoncello Solo: The Submerged Urlinie

By Carl Schachter

Although I don't usually begin articles by quoting from reviews of my work (especially bad reviews), I will do so here, for I recently received one that expresses rather well what I shall be trying to accomplish with this study. A musicologist, writing about a recent volume of essays on Mozart, had this to say:

> For European readers, less typically fluent in the analytical methods of Heinrich Schenker, Carl Schachter's contribution will prove uneasy to negotiate in all its particulars. Basic to the analysis is the notion that the identification of an underlying pattern worked out during the composition process may permit deep insights not only into technical but also, as it were, into intellectual aspects of a work. In relation to the *Jupiter* Symphony and Beethoven's First Symphony, Schachter is able to draw out a series of structural parallels in terms of their harmonic disposition, but it remains unclear to what extent this technical 'evidence' for the character of Beethoven's movement is of real significance to, as Arnold Schoenberg would have said, his musical idea.[1]

As a perhaps typical North American, I propose to identify underlying patterns worked out in the Prelude from Bach's Suite No. 4 for Violoncello Solo, in the hope that this will permit insights—whether they are deep is not for me to say—into the technical and intellectual aspects of the piece. In any case, I believe that the technical and intellectual in music are not completely separable. I also hope to shed light on what I think Arnold Schoenberg might have called the Prelude's "musical idea," though my analytic approach is by no means Schoenbergian. In what is probably his best-known explanation of the notion of "musical idea," Schoenberg seems to include in it the identification of an underlying tonal pattern. Schoenberg writes:

> Every tone which is added to a beginning tone makes the meaning of that tone doubtful. . . . In this manner there is produced a state of unrest, of imbalance which grows throughout most of the piece, and

[1] Ulrich Konrad, review of *Mozart Studies*, ed. Cliff Eisen, in *Notes* 50, no. 1 (September 1993), 135–38.

is enforced further by similar functions of the rhythm. The method by which balance is restored seems to me the real *idea* of the composition.[2]

The Musical Idea

As a glance at the score will reveal (example 1), the second melodic tone over the Prelude's initial pedal point is the D♭ of mm. 3 and 4, which, in Schoenberg's words, "produces a state of unrest, of imbalance"; it destabilizes the tonic, makes it active in the direction of the subdominant, and constrains the upper voice to descend to C. Balance might be restored in several ways, but the most effective would surely be to juxtapose the descent D♭–C with a rise from the C to D♮ and E♭ and to lead the subdominant into a dominant-tonic resolution. In mm. 7–9, Bach gives us the harmonic closure, but the melodic line does not stabilize itself, for the D♮–E♭ is obscured by a transfer down into a lower octave and a middle voice. Thus, as with Schoenberg's notion of idea, the imbalance begins to grow as the piece proceeds. In a brilliant stroke at the end of the piece, however, Bach quotes the opening pedal point for two measures, but he stops the literal repetition with a magnificent improvisatory flourish that raises the D♮ into its rightful register and resolves it to the high E♭. In this way the problem proposed at the beginning of the Prelude reaches its ultimate solution at the very end, in the coda. It is the events of the main body of the movement, however, that work through the problem to the point where this triumphant conclusion becomes possible.

Even at a preliminary stage of thinking about the Prelude, it is obvious, I think, that this process of working out reaches a turning point with the fermata on C♯ in m. 49. Not only is this tone an enharmonic transformation of the problematic D♭, but also it receives the greatest possible emphasis through its appearance in the lowest register and through the totally unexpected changes in rhythm and contour that it initiates. Although such changes often occur near the end of Bach's arpeggiated preludes, this disruption of established patterns midway through the movement is as unusual as it is unexpected and disorienting. Through the remainder of the Prelude, the improvisatory sixteenth-note runs appear side by side with the original eighth-note arpeggiations, culminating in the passage that brings in the D♮–E♭ at the very end, a passage whose contour closely resembles that of the first sixteenth-note flourish over C♯ (mm. 49–51).

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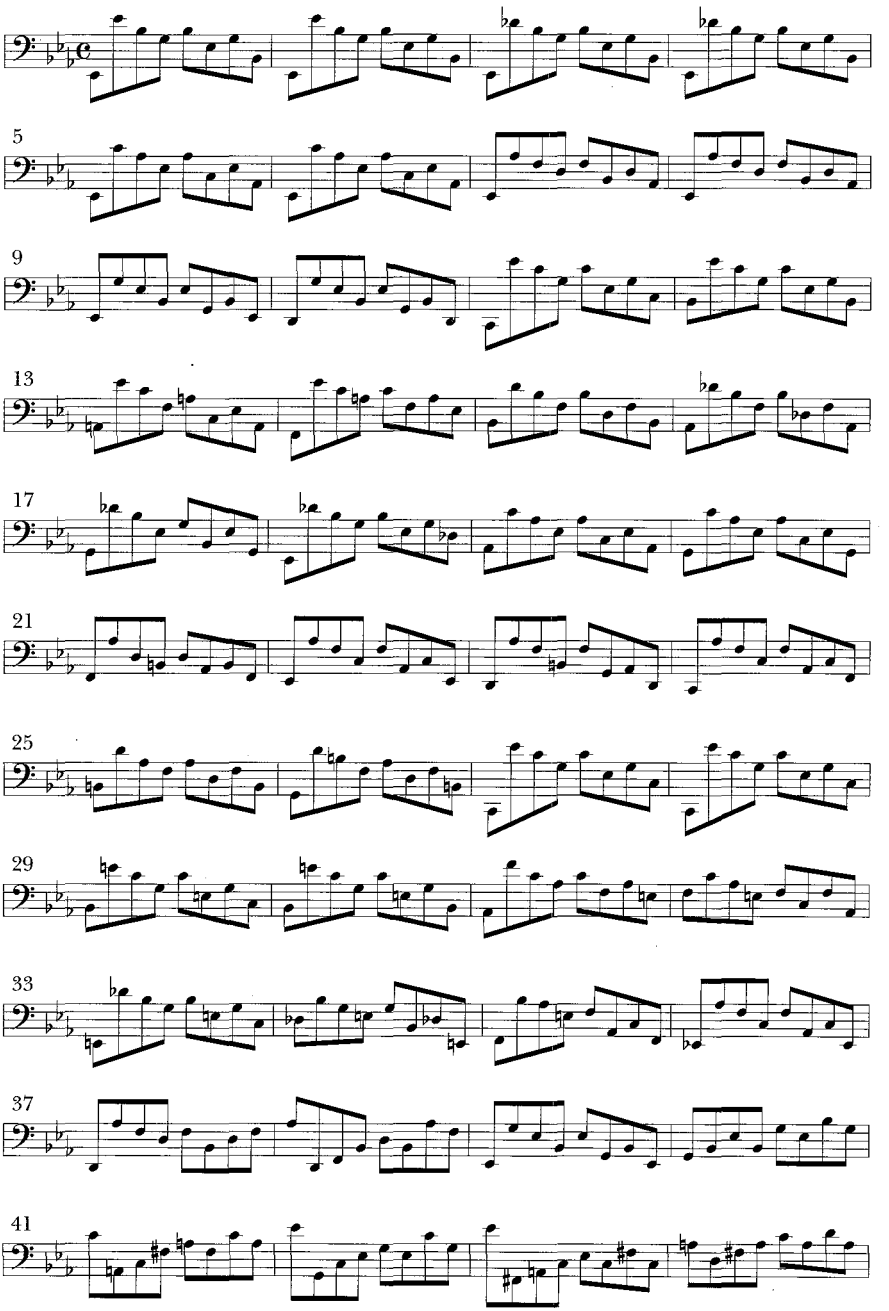
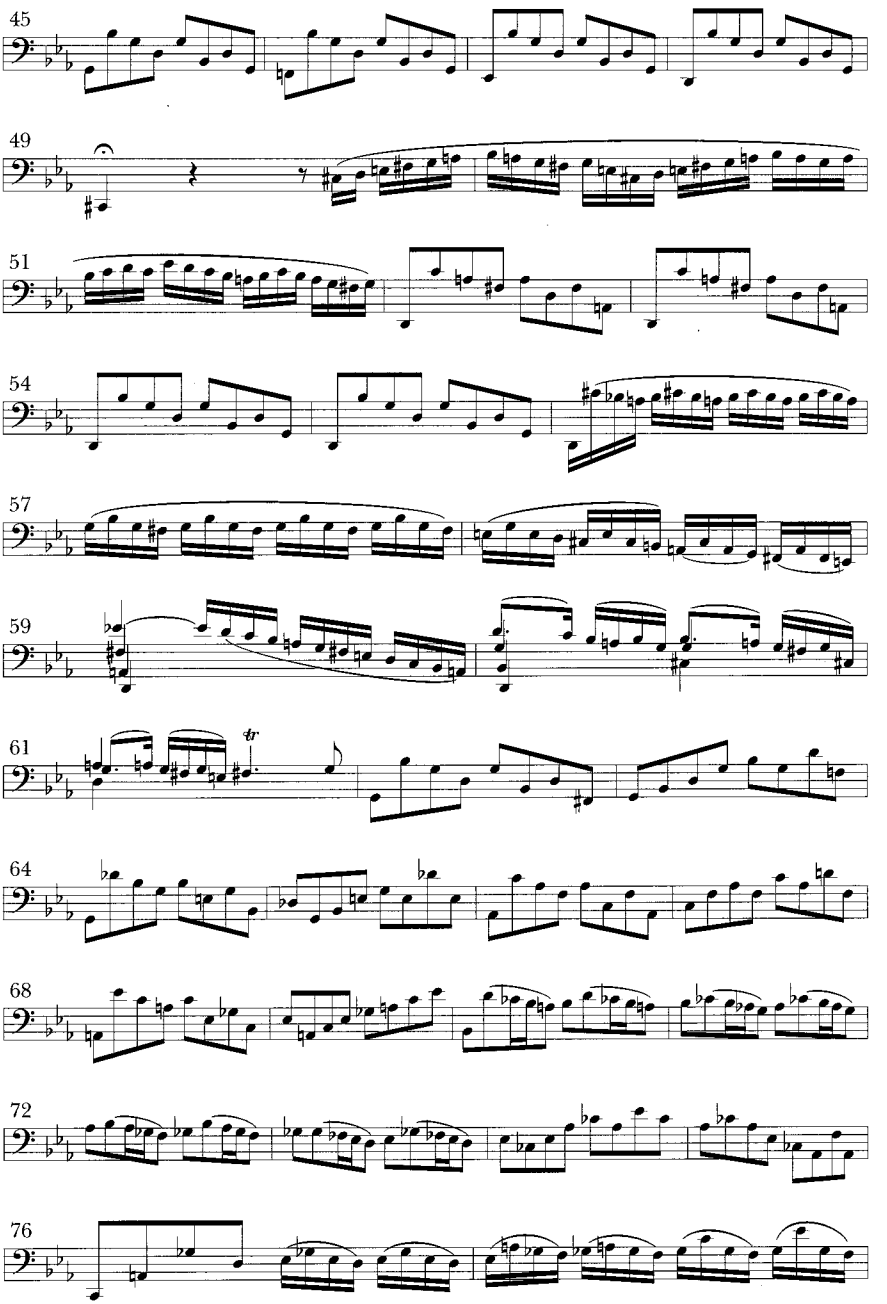
[2] Arnold Schoenberg, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea," in *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black, paperback edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 123.

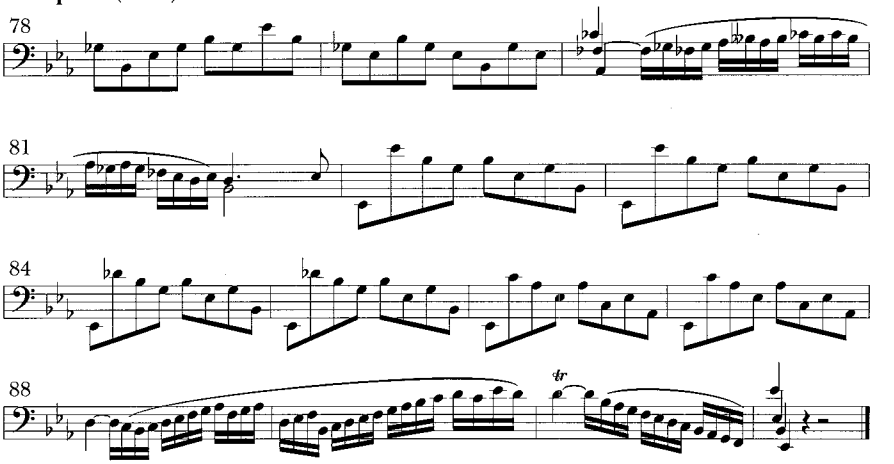
Example 1. Bach, Suite No. 4 for Violoncello Solo, Prelude.



Example 1. (cont.)



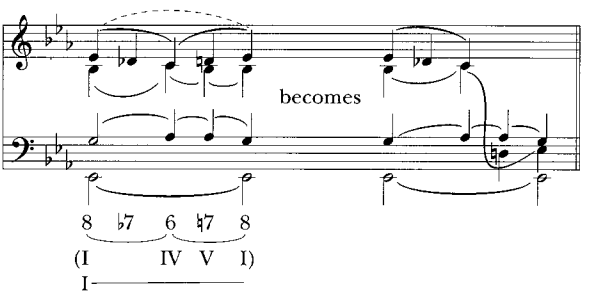
Example 1. (cont.)



The Opening Tonic Pedal and Underlying Shape: mm. 1–10

Before sketching out a view of the Prelude as a whole, I should like to take a closer look at the opening passage, for it forms the main subject of the Prelude. Much of what happens later on in the movement grows directly or indirectly out of the contents of these opening ten measures. The harmonic and melodic pattern that Bach begins to suggest (but achieves fully only at the end) is shown in example 2; it is one of the several conventional formulas that appear over countless pedal points by Bach and other composers, usually to serve as the initial announcement or final affirmation of the key. In the chapter on diminution in *Free Composition,* Schenker cites the melodic aspect of this particular idiom, together with other related figures, as an example of "boundary play."[3] He identifies it by a string of intervallic symbols 8–♭7–6–♮7–8 and two slurs, as I show in example 2.

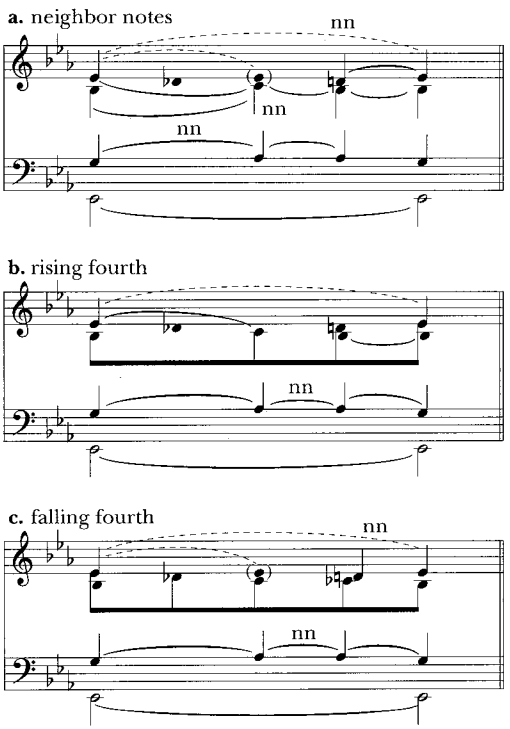
Example 2. Bach, Suite No. 4, Prelude, mm. 1-10. Underlying Shape.



[3] Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition,* trans. and ed. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), Fig. 124/1.

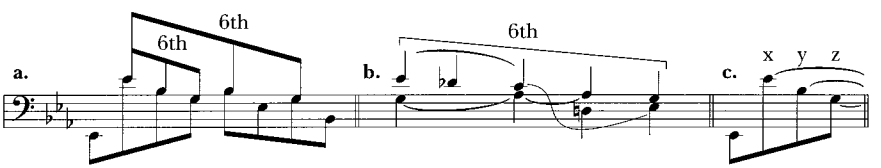
In this idiom, the beginning and end points of the motions through thirds do not represent an interval of the governing tonic chord (though the descending third does belong to the subdominant chord into which it moves). In most cases we might think of the thirds as directed to and from $\hat{6}$ as an inner-voice neighbor note (example 3a); but the connection of the neighbor note to its main note is not made explicit by the melodic diminution. Thus the progression is one of several common formulas in which $\hat{6}$ as upper neighbor gravitates to $\hat{5}$ only in the middleground voice leading. Two other interpretations are also sometimes possible: since $\hat{6}$, together with $\hat{7}$, can pass between $\hat{5}$ and $\hat{8}$ instead of serving as upper neighbor to $\hat{5}$, individual features of a passage might lead to the inference of a rising fourth-progression $\hat{5}$–$\hat{6}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{8}$ (example 3b); or, less often, a falling fourth $\hat{8}$–$\flat\hat{7}$–$\hat{6}$–$\hat{5}$ (example 3c) as a component of this idiom (the inference of a falling fourth usually requires $\flat\hat{6}$ as a chromatic passing tone on the way to $\hat{5}$).

Example 3. Bach, Suite No. 4, Prelude, mm. 1-10. Concealed Neighbor Notes and Fourth Progressions.



The register break in m. 7 of the Prelude is related to the disposition of the initial tonic chord in mm. 1–2. As example 4a shows, the high E♭ arpeggiates down to G both in an immediate, note-by-note succession and in a free augmentation that is produced by the ascending leaps to high notes. This double descent to G is mirrored in the larger contour of the upper voice, which begins on E♭ and reaches G in mm. 9–10 (example 4b). Of course, the large descent of a sixth is achieved not through a simple tonic arpeggiation, but rather through the descending register transfer of m. 7, which exposes an inner strand of the texture—A♭–G—and transforms it into the upper voice. I believe that the G thus exposed represents the $\hat{3}$ of the Prelude's Fundamental Line; if I am right, it is a Fundamental Line that is introduced in the middle of the texture rather than on top. This rather unusual disposition characterizes the Prelude as a whole, submerging the Urlinie in the midst of a complex contrapuntal web. To facilitate tracing the strands of this web, I shall refer to the one from E♭ as "x," the one from B♭ as "y," and the one from G as "z" (example 4c).

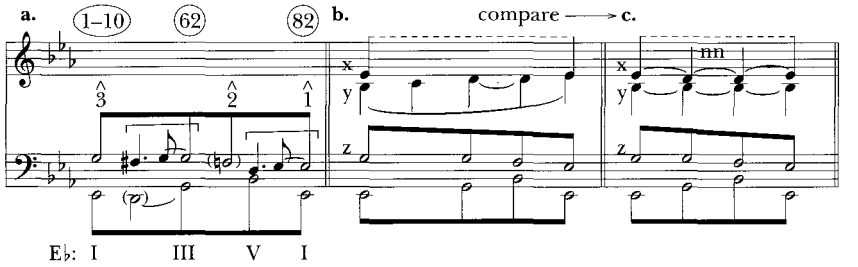
Example 4. Bach, Suite No. 4, Prelude. Opening Tonic Arpeggio and Larger Top-Voice Contour.



The Large Structure: An Overview

At this point it will be helpful to attempt at least a preliminary overview of the larger harmonic and melodic structure, to provide a context for later discussions of detail. The main outlines of the harmony are quite clear. After the fermata over C♯ in m. 49, a long improvisatory passage follows, elaborating an extended V–I cadence in G minor, III of the home key and the goal of the Prelude's main modulation. The G arrives in m. 62 and initiates a move toward its expected goal, B♭ as structural dominant (example 5). Thus, the harmonic structure would almost certainly seem to be I–III–V–I, the III tonicized by an elaborate cadence. This reading is partly confirmed by the close resemblance between the cadence into G minor and the final V–I cadence of mm. 81–82, which draws the two cadences into a single, inclusive structure. Note that the melodic resolution above III is to G, $\hat{3}$ of E♭ major, and that the parallel resolution at the end is to E♭, the $\hat{1}$. There is no literal $\hat{2}$, but D, the leading tone, provides an effective and indeed almost obligatory substitute (obligatory because D♮–E♭ is the missing part of the Prelude's governing melodic idea).

Example 5. Bach, Suite No. 4, Prelude. Overview of Structure.



The fact that the strand beginning on G—strand z—resolves to the final melodic tonic in a progression coordinated with the harmonic movement of the entire Prelude is very strong confirmation, I think, for regarding it as the Fundamental Line. That it is a Fundamental Line in the middle of the contrapuntal fabric, however, is brought home by the fact that the notes G and E♭ appear in the obligatory register only as anticipations before the downbeat; when the cadential goal arrives in the bass, the locally primary melodic line skips up to a higher region. Thus, the triadic space between 5 and 8 remains charged with activity even during the resolution of the Fundamental Line.

Example 5b gives some preliminary orientation to this activity. In it we see a rising fourth-progression leading from B♭ to E♭; as we shall see, it is this progression that forms an upper counterpoint to the Urlinie. Thus, strand y becomes an important contrapuntal element made unusually prominent by its position above the Fundamental Line. In example 5c, we can see a continuation different from the one Bach composes—one might call it the voice leading of least resistance—to show by contrast how active the middleground counterpoint is.

The C-Minor Prolongation and Parallelisms: mm. 11–28

The Prelude proceeds in an unbroken surface rhythm of continuous eighth notes from the beginning up to the fermata of m. 49. Although this long stretch of music might seem to lack interior punctuation, it is, in fact, articulated by harmony, voice leading, and motivic design. As shown in figure 1, a two-level graph with the main subdivisions of the through-composed form identified by boxed numbers between the staves, the first ten measures at [1] make an obvious inner grouping, held together by the tonic pedal and the I–IV–V–I progression above it. Although the pedal persists only through m. 9, the tenth measure forms part of this initial phase, for the D in the bass is a passing tone that leads into the next group of measures, [2]. The link thus provided is motivic as well as contrapuntal,

Figure 1.

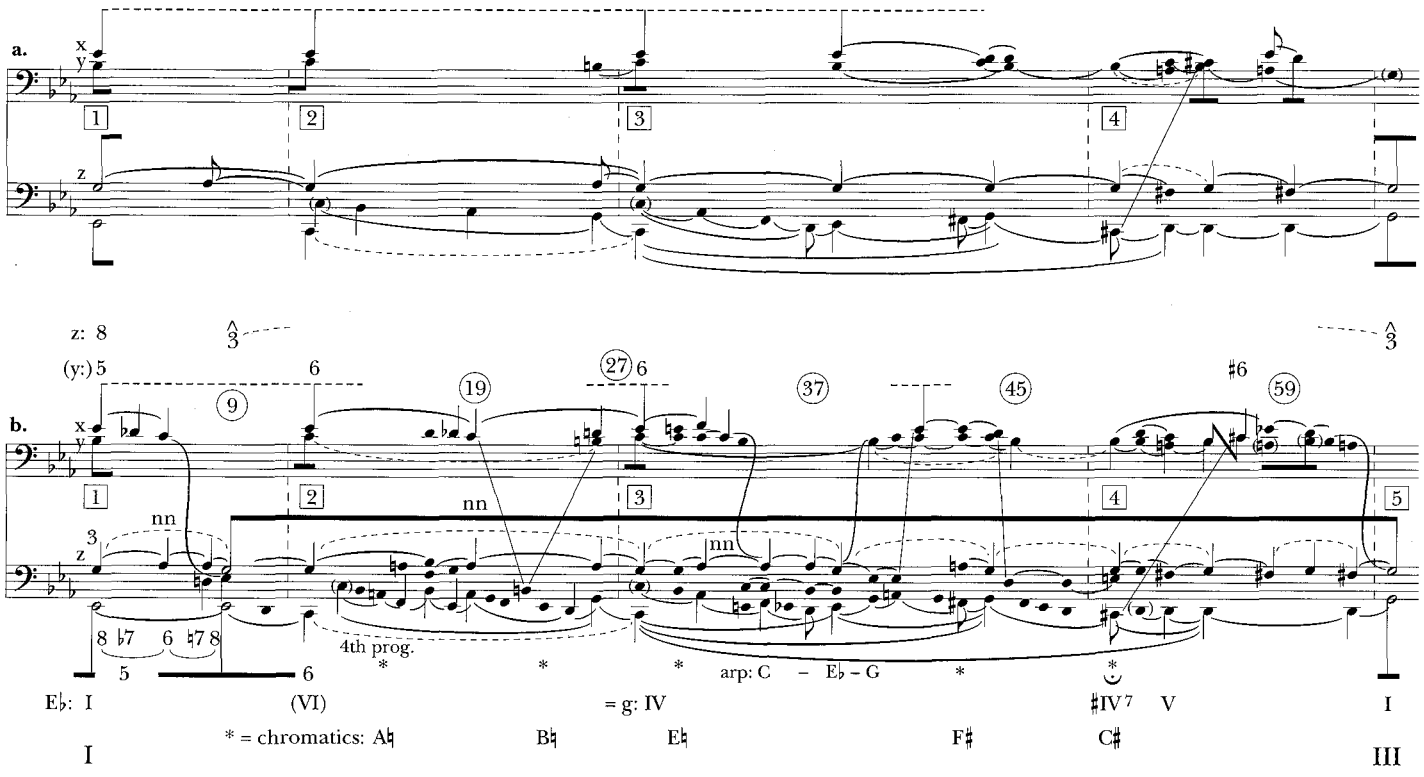
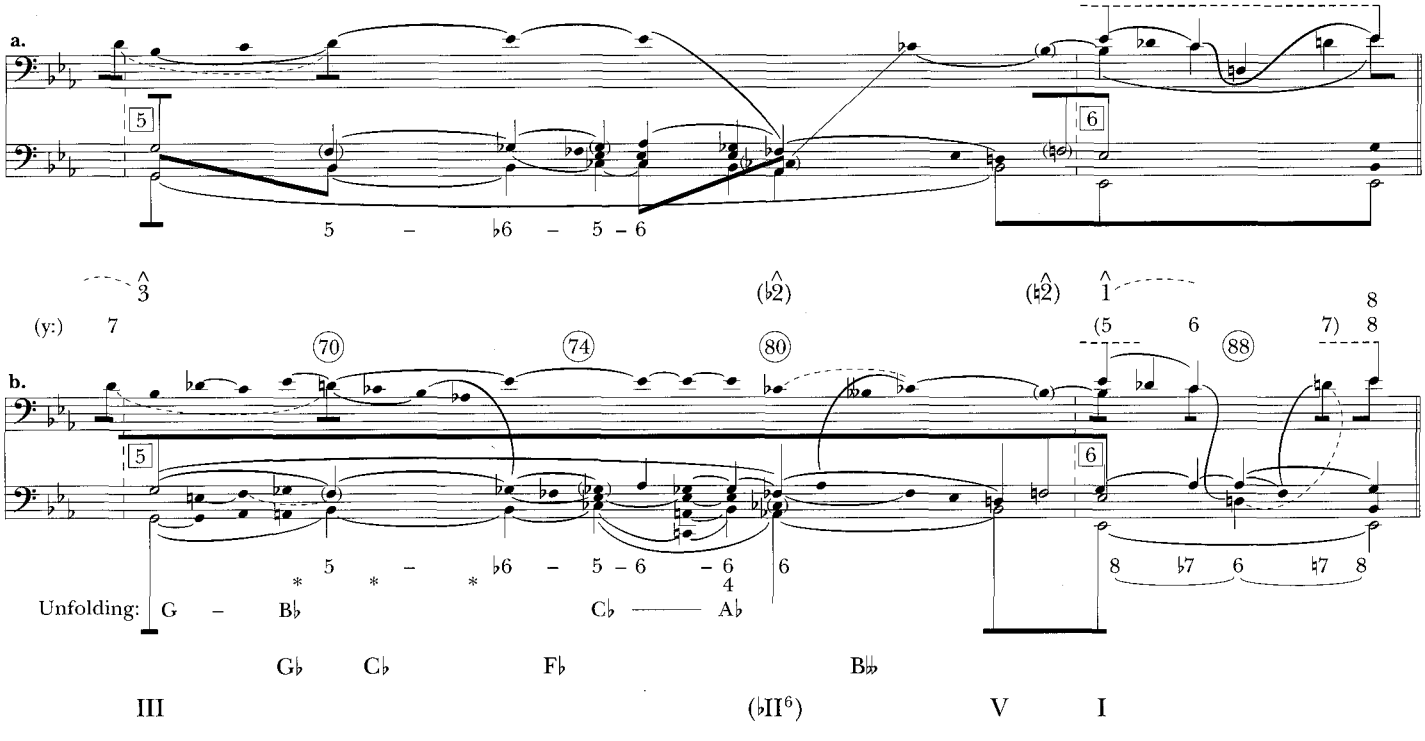
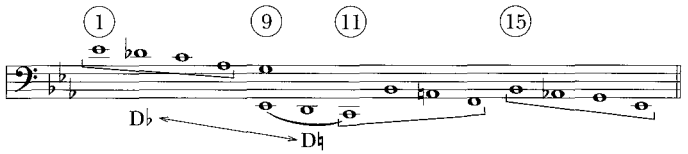

a.
x
y
z
1
2
3
4
z: 8
(y:) 5
6
b.
9
19
27
37
45
59
#6
nn
3
8 ♭7 6 ♮7 8
5
6
4th prog.
arp: C – E♭ – G
E♭: I
(VI)
= g: IV
#IV7
V
I
* = chromatics: A♮
B♮
E♮
F♯
C♯
I
III

Figure 1 (cont.)



for the bass's E♭–D♮–C is an echo and, as it were, a reproof of the E♭–D♭–C that we had just heard in the highest voice. Example 6 shows us that this is not an isolated connection between top voice and bass, for the descending sequential passage that begins in m. 11 takes up the contour—a descending triadic contour partially filled in by a passing tone—of the top voice in mm. 1–8.

Example 6. Bach, Suite No. 4, Prelude. Parallelisms.



A curious and noteworthy feature of this next passage is that at m. 11 the upper voice begins repeating, almost note-for-note, the melodic contents of mm. 1–10, but over a prolongation of C minor rather than E♭ major. Only the D♮ of m. 15 is new, and it changes to D♭ as soon as it is decently possible to do so.[4] This new juxtaposition of D♮ and D♭ intensifies the destabilizing effect of the latter sound, and keeps alive the basic "problem" of the piece—the need for a compensating ascent of D♮ to E♭. This time, however, the upper voice does supply the D♮ and E♭ in their proper register, but in a C-minor cadence, where they cannot create an effect of definitive resolution (mm. 26–27). Incidentally, C minor becomes definitively tonicized only at the cadence, but it has been prolonged throughout the passage. Note that the upper-voice C (mm. 19–20) now belongs to the locally governing chord (as it did not in mm. 5–6) and that the disposition of the C-minor chord in mm. 27–28 is exactly the same as the one in mm. 11–12, forming a perfect continuation of the opening tonic. In relation to the large-scale voice leading, the B♭ of tonic harmony has moved up to C (strand y); the other notes above the bass, E♭ and G (strands x and z), have remained stationary. The motion of B♭ to C accomplishes the first step of the rising fourth shown in example 5b.

[4] The D♮–D♭ inflection of mm. 15–16 occurs in Anna Magdalena's copy, but not in Johann Peter Kellner's, which brings in the D♭ only in m. 17. The more drastic confrontation between the natural and flat in the Anna Magdalena version produces a better reading, in my opinion, than the smoother Kellner version, which is the one more often heard nowadays, probably because August Wenzinger adopted it for his widely used edition, *Sechs Suiten: Für Violoncello Solo, BWV 1007–1012* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1950).

The Chromatic Move C–C♯–D: mm. 27–52

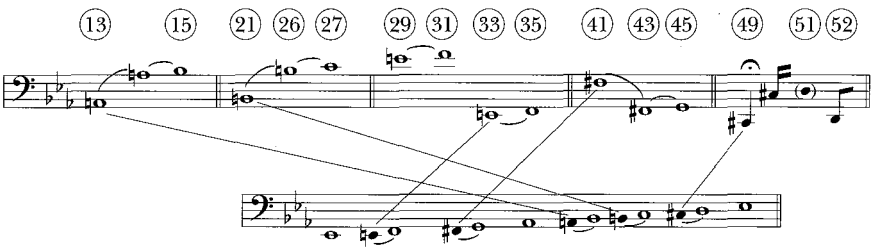
Although the C-minor cadence marks an important tonicization, it is not the main modulation of the Prelude, but only a step along the way to the massively prepared cadence in G minor—III (Figure 1 at 3). From the G (m. 62), the bass then proceeds to the V of the final structural cadence. By far the most striking moments of the Prelude are those that prepare the G minor, and a chief feature of that preparation is the intense and rhapsodic passage elaborating a diminished seventh chord on C♯. The C♯, as mentioned earlier, is a transformation of D♭, now functioning as the leading tone to D as V of G minor. Figure 1 at 3 shows how Bach moves into this C♯ diminished seventh, which represents the C-minor chord, now chromaticized and made active in the direction of D.

Beginning in m. 31, the arpeggiated surface becomes somewhat agitated. Until now, all the broken chords have maintained the same one-bar duration and wavelike contour, rising from the bass, cresting on the second note, and gradually descending to the bass note that begins the next bar. Although this basic pattern is by no means abandoned, it no longer occurs with complete uniformity. The F-minor arpeggio of mm. 31–32, for example, takes two full bars to complete its descent into the bass, and starting in m. 37, rising motion begins to take over. These changes result in a less predictable surface pattern that fluctuates, sometimes quite abruptly, in intensity. The tonal substructure fluctuates with it, creating far greater difficulties in orientation for the listener. In my view, neither the E♭ triad of m. 39 nor the G minor of m. 45 should be understood as representing a structural harmony. In other words, the E♭ is not a continuation of the initial tonic, and the G is not yet a structural arrival on the mediant. Rather, both the E♭ and the G minor are offshoots of the preceding C minor, forming a large-scale arpeggiation C–E♭–G. The G minor, then, acts as the dividing upper fifth of C rather than as a goal in its own right. In particular, the prior emphasis on F minor (in mm. 31–35) tends to keep the G minor within the C minor/E♭ major orbit and prevents it from sounding like a temporary tonic.

In the upper voices, the G of strand z has remained stationary, retained from the opening E♭ and the C minor that follows it into the C♯ diminished seventh. The C over C minor—the continuation of strand y's B♭—moves down to B♭ over the diminished seventh. This B♭ does not connect structurally with the B♭ that begins strand y; it is a passing tone that will resolve into the V of G minor in m. 52. At more or less the same time, a C♯ reaches over the B♭ to form a long-range continuation of strand y's C. The highest tone of the opening tonic and the C minor, E♭, has the most unusual continuation, moving to D in m. 44, where it abruptly breaks off, at least in its original high register. The D continues, however, in a lower octave as part of the G-minor chord of mm. 45–48.

The arrival on the bass C♯ and its eventual resolution to D form the culmination of the initial phase of the Prelude's chromaticism. From the beginning through the G-minor cadence, all chromatically altered pitches other than the D♭ have resulted from upward inflections, mostly producing applied leading tones: A♮ to B♭, B♮ to C, E♮ to F, F♯ to G, and finally C♯ to D. The order in which accidentals appear corresponds to the rising circle of fifths, except that B♮ precedes E♮; note in particular that the two sharps appear last. As example 7 shows, this process fills in a complete chromatic scale; by moving up in naturals and sharps, Bach arrives at the enharmonic equivalent of D♭, the initial chromatic disturbance, and the enharmonic reinterpretation directs the sound to an upward resolution to D. These leading-tone chromatics replicate in transposition the upward drive of the missing step D–E♭, which is now almost within view.

Example 7. Bach, Suite No. 4, Prelude. Rising Chromatics.



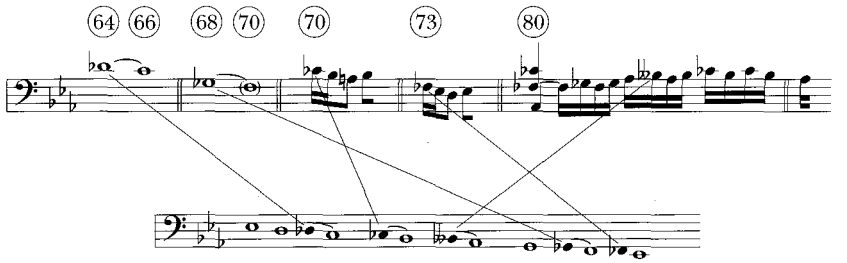
The G-minor Cadence: mm. 49–62

The B♭ at the top of the diminished seventh chord (mm. 49–51) could descend immediately to A and G, over a V–I cadence in G minor, but Bach chooses a far more extravagant procedure. The basic idea, as I suggested earlier, is for the C♯ to reach over the B♭ in m. 56 as a kind of free indirect suspension above the bass D (figure 1 at 4). In this way, it can occupy the same register as the D♭ of m. 3, clarifying its role as the alter ego of that original chromatic sound. In addition, it can repeat the bass C♯'s rise to D, but displaced in time, so that no parallel octaves result. The D appears in the uppermost voice in m. 60, following the expressive ninth, E♭, which further strengthens the association with the beginning of the Prelude and its D♭. After this, the contrapuntal strand containing it breaks off, not to reappear until after the G-minor cadence. The move C♯–D in the one-line octave has important implications for the large-scale voice leading. As I try to show in figure 1a, the C♯ forms a large-scale connection with the C over C minor, and this connection brings strand y up from C to D. At the same time, the B♭ of the big diminished seventh chord is free to resolve to A over V of G minor, and the A, in turn, moves to G, the $\hat{3}$ of the structural upper voice.

From G Minor to the End: mm. 62–91

As we have seen, Bach gradually introduces naturals and sharps in the first half of the Prelude until all five raised chromatics have been introduced. In this final phase, a reverse procedure occurs: a descending chromatic collection is brought about by the introduction of the five lowered degrees. This time, the new accidentals are mostly associated with mode mixture, an aspect of chromaticism completely absent from the Prelude until after the G-minor cadence. The accidentals appear in full correspondence with the descending circle of fifths; thus we have D♭ again in m. 64, G♭ in m. 68, C♭ in m. 70, F♭ in m. 73, and B𝄫 in m. 80 (see example 8).

Example 8. Bach, Suite No. 4, Prelude. Falling Chromatics.



The last alteration appears over a ♭II chord, an F♭ major $\frac{6}{3}$ that introduces the final cadential dominant in m. 81. This Neapolitan sixth bears a heavy weight of chromatics, for the chord itself is formed by two of our flatted notes, F♭ and C♭, while two others, G♭ and B𝄫, appear as passing tones; thus all the lowered chromatics except the original D♭ appear as part of the Prelude's final cadence. Partly because the Neapolitan represents the culmination of an important process of chromatic elaboration, I consider it the hinge on which the harmonic motion from III to V turns. Thus, I see a large-scale bass motion G (m. 62), A♭ (m. 80), B♭ (m. 81), and I do not regard the prominent B♭ chord in m. 70 or the $\frac{6}{4}$ over B♭ in m. 78 as representing the onset of the structural V (see Figure 1, 5).

The hard task Bach set himself here is to create a transition from the G minor cadence, with its prominent C♯s, F♯s, and A♮s, to E♭ minor, with its plethora of flats increased further by the emphasized Neapolitan harmony. That harmony makes a particularly difficult problem for the voice leading of strand z—the structural top voice—in that a motion from $\hat{3}$ in major to $\hat{\flat 2}$ creates a most unattractive augmented second unless mediated by other pitches. Bach's approach to the final cadence is best understood, I think, in the light of these considerations (Figure 1, 5 and 6). As I see it, the bass executes an unfolding G–B♭–C♭–A♭; the B♭ of m. 70, therefore,

functions as the upper third of G rather than as a structural V. It is at this point that the shift to minor begins. Note that the C♭ is inflected to C♮ in mm. 76–77, before moving down to the A♭.

Strand z elaborates the Urlinie with an ascent from G to its upper neighbor, A♭, over the C♭ of the bass unfolding (mm. 74–75). From this A♭, strand z moves in sixths above the bass to the Neapolitan's ♭$\hat{2}$. Typically, the leading tone substitutes for ♮$\hat{2}$ at the final cadence. As in the move to G minor, the melodic goal appears only as an anticipation before the downbeat; here the reprise of the opening bars prevents a literal resolution in the Urlinie's obligatory register. Meanwhile, strand y, which broke off on D in m. 60, just before the G-minor cadence, resumes immediately thereafter. A motion in tenths above the bass arrives at D again in m. 70. That D moves to E♭ in m. 74, above the bass C♭, and the E♭ might be expected to return to D over V in the final cadence. Two factors prevent this: the appearance of the Neapolitan chord, which constrains the E♭ to move to F♭, and the resolution of the Urlinie (strand z) in its proper register, which transfers the move from E♭ to F♭ into the next lower octave. Thus, the rising fourth-progression has once more interrupted its course at a cadential point, giving way to the descending impulse of the Urlinie. The coda completes this unfinished business: the sixteenth-note flurry that lifts the D into the higher octave corrects the previous downward transfer and makes possible the splendid resolution of the D to the final E♭.

As Figure 1 shows, I read the voice leading over the final tonic pedal somewhat differently from the beginning of the piece, despite the fact that it is essentially the same music. The prominent C♭ over the Neapolitan leads into the fifth of the final tonic, giving it far more prominence than at the opening. This, combined with the massively emphasized D♮–E♭ at the end, strongly suggests that the guiding linear idea is a rising fourth $\hat{5}$–$\hat{6}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{8}$ as in example 3b. This rising fourth would be a diminution nested within the big fourth (strand y) that spans the whole Prelude.

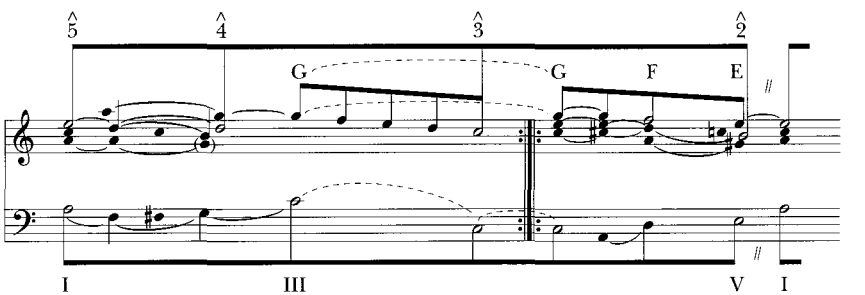
The Submerged Urlinie

In view of the importance of the rising fourth in the Prelude, why regard the $\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$ as the structural line? First of all, because it, rather than the rising fourth, is the primary melodic constituent of the big harmonic cadences, and these cadences clearly shape the tonal movement of the piece. One certainly hears the resolution into the final tonic at m. 82, not m. 91, despite the importance of completing the ascent to the high E♭. Second, the G is a far more prominent constituent of the opening tonic prolongation than the B♭. And third, in this piece, the $\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$ line is representative of the melodic structure that characterizes the tonal repertory at

large. In that repertory the relation of background to middleground and foreground will vary, sometimes enormously, from piece to piece. There are pieces whose structural dominants are prolonged for a hundred bars and other pieces (like this one) whose structural dominants last half a bar or less.

So too there are pieces whose melodic design is largely an exfoliation of the Urlinie and others (like this one) where the contrapuntal interplay between several upper voices is important enough to reduce the explanatory power of inferring a two-voice framework. This Prelude is not a unique case. Many years ago, Ernst Oster pointed out to me that in the first movement of Mozart's A-minor Piano Sonata, an upper-voice line G–F–E spans the second key area of the exposition and the entire development, overarching the Urlinie's $\hat{4}$–$\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$, which becomes a kind of inner voice (example 9). Recognizing what the Mozart Sonata or Bach Prelude have in common with the repertory as a whole in no way diminishes our recognition of what makes them unique. If anything the differences stand out more clearly when measured by a common standard.

Example 9. Mozart, Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310, first movement, after Ernst Oster.



Oppositions

In the Prelude, the interplay between the falling Urlinie and the rising fourth above it forms part of a larger compositional issue—the opposition of ascending and descending motion—that is an inescapable constituent of any music with organized pitches. This opposition plays an inordinately great role in the design and structure of the Prelude. Indeed if the musical idea of the Prelude involves the restoration of equilibrium after an initial disturbance, it is largely in terms of the opposition of descending and ascending that the idea seems to be conceived. The first and primary constituent of that idea is the D♭/D♮ conflict, which is resolved only in the last two bars. Derived from that initial impulse is a systematic exploration of raised accidentals in the first half of the piece until a turning point is

reached as the D♭ appears transformed into a C♯; in the second half, lowered accidentals predominate, moving down the circle of fifths and culminating in the cadential Neapolitan chord. The initial lack of a D♮ commensurate in impact with the D♭ of mm. 3–4 results from a transfer of the upper line into a lower octave and inner voice; at the end, the D♮ transfers up from that lower octave to arrive at the high E♭. The downward transfer, foretold by the contour of the initial E♭ arpeggio, exposes the $\hat{3}$ of the Urlinie with its descending resolution. At the same time, this transfer sets up the need for D♮ and E♭ in the higher octave, a need that motivates the rising fourth $\hat{5}$–$\hat{6}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{8}$ and situates it above the $\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$. Thus, the Urlinie, like a tenor cantus firmus, appears within a contrapuntal complex, rather than dominating it from above; and the down/up contrast involves both location in musical space and direction of motion.

Symbolism?

In working on the Prelude, I have been tempted from time to time to translate its tonal events into the language of Christian symbolism. The down/up dichotomy seems to be worked out with such consistency and the transformation of D♭ into C♯ occurs in so dramatic and unexpected a manner as to suggest to me the possibility of a hidden program. Therefore, I shall offer one, though I am not completely convinced of its validity, and I usually refrain from swimming in such sharp-infested waters. Briefly, the change of D♭ into C♯ may symbolize the redemption of fallen humanity through the crucifixion. The German word for "sharp" is, of course, "Kreuz," and Bach does sometimes use sharps as cross symbols, the best-known instance being Versus V of the cantata *Christ lag in Todesbanden,* BWV 4, mm. 28–30. In the Prelude, the elaborated fermata also has a melodic contour with several crosslike changes of direction, and the climactic C♯–E♭–D in the upper voice of mm. 56–60 makes a particularly vivid chiastic shape, with its overlapped resolutions to D from below and above.

In the music of mm. 1–10, the jaggedly descending arpeggios, the D♭ falling to C, the downward transfer of the initial upper voice, and the consequent lack of a D♮ rising to E♭ in the proper high register might then all stand for the fall of sinful humanity. The systematic introduction of rising accidentals that permeates the next phase could represent steps in the believer's path toward salvation. This spiritual journey involves a contemplation of the Cross, symbolized by the advent of C♯, which transforms the initial falling chromatic sound into one that rises. After the G-minor cadence, the music introduces lowered accidentals, a process that culminates in the cadential Neapolitan chord and the downward resolution of the Urlinie. These tonal events might suggest mortality and physical death,

but they are mitigated by the final rise to the high E♭, the saved soul's ascent to heaven.

Quite apart from theological hermeneutics, the contrast between the opening and closing pedal points is a contrast between the disruption of a musical process and its completion, between musical frustration and fulfillment. And the tonal events between the two pedal points are what makes the music achieve completion and fulfillment in so overpoweringly convincing a way. At the beginning of this paper, I quoted a review that questioned whether the awareness of an underlying pattern worked out in the course of a composition sheds light on more than the technical aspects of that composition. Actually, I think that understanding the technical aspects of a piece is valuable in and of itself, and that producing an analysis that increases such understanding is not cause for shame. But I know that not everyone agrees with me. There is a gulf—often one that cannot be bridged, I fear—between musicians who find notes and the sounds they represent worthy objects of close study, and those who do not. Certainly there is more to music than structure, and that something more is also worthy of close study. But to deny the relevance of structure to the intellectual aspects of a composition or to its cultural context is ultimately to diminish one's conception of music.

ABSTRACT

The contrapuntal texture of the Prelude from Bach's Suite No. 4 for Solo Violoncello involves a quick-moving and active bass line above which all three factors of the tonic triad initiate important linear strands: $\hat{8}$ forms a cover tone that begins and ends the Prelude; $\hat{5}$ is the first note of a rising fourth-progression that culminates in the final $\hat{8}$; $\hat{3}$ descends to $\hat{1}$ at the structural cadence before the coda. These three strands interact with each other and with the bass in complex ways; among the complexities is a carefully elaborated introduction of chromatic elements, centering on a contradiction between D♭ and D♮ whose resolution helps to direct the Prelude's large-scale harmonic structure.

In the opening tonic arpeggio, $\hat{3}$ lies below $\hat{8}$ and $\hat{5}$, and a disposition that characterizes the Prelude as a whole. Thus the descent from $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{1}$ occurs in the middle of the texture rather than at the top. This structural line is embedded within a contrapuntal complex in a way that gives it a somewhat unusual character. The "melodic" foreground sounds less like the exfoliation of the Urlinie than like the composite of elements from the three primary strands, the Urlinie being first among equals rather than the governing upper voice. This suggests that the inference of a two-part outer-voice counterpoint has less explanatory power for the Prelude than it does for most of the tonal repertory.